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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002727

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: KANO GOVERNOR ON OBASANJO PERFORMANCE

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reasons 1.5 (B & D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: During a September 5 call on Ambassador Jeter, Kano State Governor Rabi'u Kwankwaso offered his assessment of the Obasanjo Presidency and urged continued USG support for Nigerian democratization. Kwankwaso, Nigeria's youngest state governor and at the helm of the nation's largest state in population and territory, was confident of his own standing and appears well-positioned for the upcoming round of elections. End Summary.

2. (C) Kano State Governor Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso, accompanied by the Special Advisor for Metropolitan Affairs Akilu Indabawa and the state's Health Commissioner, paid a call on Ambassador Jeter on 5 September during one of the Governor's visits to Abuja. Responding to Ambassador Jeter's questions, Kwankwaso and his companions expounded on the current political problems facing the Obasanjo Presidency.

3. (C) Kwankwaso said that many of Nigeria's problems stemmed from the pace of transition from military to civilian rule. Obasanjo had been out of touch with politicians since stepping down as military ruler in 1979 and that fact, coupled with his incarceration and possible torture late in the Abacha regime, meant that he was not sufficiently involved in politics and was thus ill-prepared to assume leadership of the country.

4. (C) Further, Kwankwaso noted, the pot was boiling because Nigeria had never successfully had a transition between two democratically-elected civilian governments. In some ways, conducting credible elections in 2003 will be more difficult than in 1999. Moreover, the failure of past democratic experiments has dissuaded many able people from political participation. This has had a leveling effect on the quality of governance and political discourse in the country. In Kwankwaso's assessment, the 2003 elections and the subsequent round in 2007 will likely continue to attract the self-interested politicians who dominate Nigerian politics today. For instance, the genesis of the impeachment crisis is the lack of understanding among relatively inexperienced politicians of the appropriate relationship between political parties and the government. Kwankwaso said that the presidential system lessens party control over the workings of government and was radically different from the parliamentary system, where party loyalty is a necessity in defining and directing the government's goals. Rather than building civil society, the USG focus its assistance on fostering a deeper understanding of the role of the parties in a presidential system, the Kano Governor explained.

5. (C) Kwankwaso believed Obasanjo was a sincere patriot with Nigeria's best interests at heart, but the uneven wisdom of his appointments and the structure of the Presidency "reflects on the quality of his leadership." The Governor rightly pointed out that some among the Cabinet were "losers in their own districts," unable to be elected on their own merits. Others were appointed by Obasanjo to balance the myriad competing political, regional and ethnic interests in Nigeria. Unfortunately, in Kwankwaso's opinion, Obasanjo's assessment of these interests was off the mark, based on his own incomplete understanding of political developments in Nigeria in recent years. Kwankwaso identified the most serious problem for the Presidency as communications, both domestically and with the outside world.

6. (C) The Health Commissioner commented the number of Ministers and Special Advisors in the Presidency, which he figured at about 100, created an uncontrollable bureaucracy. With each person pursuing his own interests, no one was looking out for the interests of the President. Kwankwaso asked rhetorically, "Where have the Ministers and Advisors been while the Legislature was calling for Obasanjo's impeachment? Invisible!" While each one should

be selling the merits of Obasanjo's leadership and highlighting his accomplishments, they have all gone aground, waiting for the air to clear and figuring how to maximize their own individual interests in the aftermath.

17. (C) Communications with the public has been no better. In Kano, Kwankwaso complained, it was Kano State personnel who identified projects initiated by Federal authorities in order to publicize them to the voters. "The Ministers should be touting the government's accomplishments to the electorate in order to improve the image of their boss," Kwankwaso lamented. Instead, when anyone gets credit, it is usually the Minister rather than the Administration.

18. (C) On the upcoming elections, and despite his criticism of the President, Kwankwaso was confident that he could deliver Kano to Obasanjo, regardless of who runs against him. The Health Commissioner commented, however, that Obasanjo was making a serious mistake by ignoring the North. "Kano is the most populous state in the country, and the Hausa-Fulani are the most populous tribe," he said. He was perplexed by Obasanjo's perceived inattention to the political needs of this important region. When Ambassador Jeter asked whether press reports that the President was losing support in the north because of his prosecution of Mohammed Abacha, Kwankwaso sniffed, "Keeping him in jail bothers no one." Contending that Kano indigenes had no love for the Abacha family, he said that, conversely, letting Abacha out could be a blow to Obasanjo's popularity and credibility. And in response to Ambassador's question about House of Representatives Speaker Na'abba's chances for reelection, Kwankwaso pointedly asked, "Do you want him to return?" The implication that the Governor could derail Na'abba's political career was seconded by Indabawa, who commented that anyone supported by Kwankwaso was virtually assured of election.

19. (C) COMMENT: Kwankwaso appeared relaxed and confident about his future political prospects and prowess. Like other Northerners who back Obasanjo, Kwankwaso is not enamored with the President and is full of criticism of his Administration; however he likely views the President as a known quantity and the lesser evil among the many possible candidates. His assessment of the weaknesses of Obasanjo's Administration is telling and tracks with our own: a Presidency staffed with too many uncoordinated Special Assistants and Advisors, most with no clear mandate about their respective portfolios, no vision or clear message, and an extraordinary inability to sell the man who leads the nation from Aso Rock.

ANDREWS